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HISTORICAL STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURE MATERIAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

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II. HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH.

1. *Misfortune and Gloom.* It was a melancholy state of affairs which succeeded the first glad season when the returned set their feet once again within the precincts of the Holy City. They found themselves exposed to all the hardships of new settlers without their encouragements. Petty quarrels with their neighbors disturbed their peace. A succession of bad harvests, drought and other material troubles discouraged them. Worse than all else, they looked and looked in vain for the help and presence of their brethren of the East, and for that active material encouragement which Cyrus seemed inclined at first to give. Upon that they depended for the building of the temple — a work which they deemed essential to all their religious progress, regarded both in its temporal and spiritual aspects. All seemed to indicate that Jehovah was still unfavorable to them as He had been during exile times. The heavens above, the earth beneath, the world around, read off the same story. "He was not in the mood to have His house builded. He had not opened the way, rather had He closed all ways, whereby they might obtain means for its erection. The time was not ripe." So they interpreted Providence, and apparently with reason. The evident thing to do was to live along and wait for better times, meanwhile making the most for themselves out of the present unhappy days. Perhaps at first they sincerely and conscientiously purposed to put themselves into the best possible condition for the new morning when it should dawn, but, as the darkness deepened, they sank gradually back into vague questioning and doubt, or dumb acquiescence in the situation. No wonder that they began to lose heart; hope faded away; listlessness and a petty spirit of sordid care and self-seeking took the place of that hopeful and determined faith which, but little more than a decade before, had left comfort and friends behind and braved the desert, in order to re-establish upon the Holy Hill the worship of Jehovah and thus usher in the Messianic Kingdom.

2. *The News from the East.* From this wretched apathy they were roused by a succession of stirring events in the world around them. Cambyses is suddenly summoned from Egypt by the news that the Magian Gaumata has usurped the throne under the name of his murdered brother, Bardiya. Hastening back past the Jewish colony in Jerusalem with his army,

he dies of a self-inflicted wound in a city of Syria, perhaps Hamath, not so very far north of them. They have scarcely had time to become conscious of the new reign, when Dareios, a scion of the royal line of the Achæmenidae, joining with himself other Persian nobles, slays the usurper in his own palace, and ascends the throne in 521 B. C. His accession is the signal for revolt in the North, East and South. The complex of Iranian tribes and peoples,¹ gathered under Cyrus' vigorous rule, — the rule, be it remembered, of a once vassal king, — now breaks in pieces when Dareios, the Persian, takes the kingdom. The great empire is in an uproar of confusion. From Babylonia, Media, Armenia, distant Iran, Elam and the original Persia itself, come tidings of rebellion against the new ruler. In every part of the realm the question hangs in the balance whether the empire of Cyrus will survive his son. The colony of Jews living not far from the great commercial and military highway between East and West hears the tramp of the armies and wakes once more to new life and thought, to a higher consciousness of duty and destiny.

3. *Haggai's first Sermon, "Consider!"* Two men feel the first impulse of the changed conditions, prophets, who hear in the confused din of arms and shouting the voice of Jehovah calling the people to "consider their ways." It was on the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Dareios, in August 520, at what was probably an assembly of the people on a festal occasion, that Haggai spake the word of Jehovah unto Zerubbabel and Joshua.² It may be that some special disaster to their crops, some long continued drought during the months immediately preceding,³ had impressed anew on their minds the thought of Jehovah's anger toward them. He calls them to reconsider their customary interpretation of these things and their habitual attitude resulting from it. Had they understood the meaning of these events? Was not Jehovah's anger the result of their neglect to build His temple? They had taken the result for the cause, entirely misinterpreting the Divine mind and dealing. The difficulty lay with *them* that they had not complied with the first condition of Jehovah's favor, the building of the temple. They had neglected this and cared for themselves, thus becoming doubly guilty and deserving of wrath. This was the meaning of their present calamities. "Consider your doings, consider," he cried, and "to the work!" This new and impressive teaching struck home to the hearts of the leaders and the people. They began to "consider," and, doubtless under Haggai's continued exhortation, to comprehend their folly and sin. To the

¹ It is significant that with the exception of Babylon no subjected nationalities revolt. The rebels are all of the ruling Aryan peoples.

² Called Jeshua in Ezra.

³ There is some reason for regarding the references to the hardships of their condition in Haggai i. 6, 9-11, as applying to recent troubles not to the experiences of the last fifteen years. That they dwelt in comfortable houses and are reproached for their selfishness by the prophet, indicates a measure of material prosperity in the past.

new spirit of repentance the prophet spoke words of encouragement which came with the weight of divine inspiration, saying, "'I am with you,' saith the LORD." Reconsideration led to action, and on the 24th of the same month—a date carefully recorded—work was begun on the "Lord's house."

4. *Haggai's second Sermon, "Be Strong!"* Scarcely a month later the prophet speaks again. They have considered and repented and are at work. But discouragement steals over them. They recall the former glory of the house. They think of the sadly shrunken ideal. Plunged into the debris of building they can not see the finished structure in the single stones which must be piled one on the other, or if they can imagine it, can not see in it anything to desire. The prophet calls them away from such thoughts. The time to "consider" is past. Now is the day to "be strong," for Jehovah is no longer displeased. He is with them, "Jehovah of hosts," the LORD of armies. Do they hear the noise of the battle in the earth? Is the empire tottering? Must Dareios fight for the existence of his kingdom? Let them build the temple, for into this building—small and inglorious though it seem—will come the "desirable things of all the nations" which are trembling and shaking under the hand of Jehovah. Let the temple be only made ready, that the Messianic day, ushered in with war and tumult, may dawn in full glory, and peace reign from Jerusalem.

5. *Zechariah; Haggai's last Words.* Moved by the example and words of Haggai, another prophet raises his voice, Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo. His first sermon delivered in the eighth month is but an echo of the elder prophetic message, as a young bird trying its voice repeats the note heard in the nest. "Return to me, saith Jehovah," and the calamities which followed your fathers will be averted. Your "ways" are the standard of judgment, consider them and be wise. Haggai follows toward the close of the ninth month with an address in which he again forces home on the people the corrupting and wide-reaching influences of their sin in leaving the Temple unbuilt, appearing in disasters to their crops, which have their effect even in the days now passing. But the daydawn of blessing is at hand.¹ And again the threatening state of outward affairs looms up before him and he sees in it and beyond it—through overthrow of nations, the chariots and their riders,—the exaltation of the Messianic kingdom. He boldly speaks out his conviction relating to Zerubbabel that he is to be the chosen king.² The lofty hopes cherished by the Jewish patriots of this period for Zerubbabel had some justification in the general situation of affairs. While at the date of Haggai's preaching, Dareios had succeeded in making some headway against the rebels, it is evident that news of the great disturbances would reach Jerusalem slowly, and the significance of his victories would not at first be grasped. Indeed for three years, at least, the question was undecided. It was believed by those devout seers that the breaking up of nationalities

¹ Hag. ii. 10-19.

² Hag. ii. 20-23.

was making the way for the Kingdom, and it is quite probable that a special reason existed for the prophetic expectation which centered on Zerubbabel in his appointment, presumably by Dareios, as "governor of Judah,"¹ a position which he did not hold when first he led the returned exiles to Jerusalem. In this beginning of dignities the prophet saw the fulfillment of the promise. That Haggai speaks in such plain terms as those in ii. 21-23 shows the enthusiasm and conviction which the new situation wrought in the minds of the most thoughtful and patriotic men of the time. These are his last recorded words, but his ideas and expectations are accepted, enlarged and preached by his younger and more brilliant contemporary Zechariah, with a fullness of conviction and vividness of illustration, marking the culmination of this period of national awakening.

6. *Zechariah's great Sermon; its Form.* Zechariah's great discourse, occupying chapters i. 7 to vi. 8 of the book of his prophecies, is peculiar in its form, showing by its apocalyptic character the influence of Ezekiel. It is a vigorous and splendid picture of the situation, its lessons and its hopes. That he was capable of simple and direct exhortation and instruction his first sermon² shows clearly. His selection of the more enigmatic form of vision and symbol for his other discourses is explicable not only by reason of the influence of the elder prophet of the exile, but also, as we shall hope to see more in detail later, in view of the peculiar situation in which he found himself. That situation it is necessary now to explain.

7. *Its Occasion and the Crisis.* Not long after the beginning of work on the Temple in accordance with the exhortations of Haggai, Jerusalem was visited by the Persian satrap of Syria, Tattenai and his official staff.³ Whether the visit was made in consequence of hearing something about the suspicious activity of the Jews or was merely the usual official inspection, is not stated, but the new work could not escape his eye. He was probably a new appointee under Dareios and was perhaps making the rounds of his province for the first time. He inquired into the authority for the building of the Temple, demanded the names of those who were directing it, and having obtained the desired information sent a report to his royal master, asking that the original decree of Cyrus to the exiles be looked up and the pleasure of Dareios with respect to the continuance of the work signified. Thereupon he departed, putting no restriction upon the Jews in respect to their activity during the mean time, but most probably leaving one of his officers to see that nothing which threatened the peace of the realm was undertaken in connection with the work. It may well be believed that this visit and its consequences were liable to have a disastrous effect upon the zeal and determination of the people in the task which they had undertaken. Would it after all be in vain? In the midst of the disorder of civil war, could the decree be discovered and would Dareios be inclined to favor them?

¹ Such is his title in Haggai.

² Zech. i. 1-6.

³ Ezra v. 1-17.

The uncertainty was enough to cast a chill upon their spirits and unnerve them. Here was the opportunity of Jehovah's prophet, an opportunity demanding for the overcoming of the difficulties encircling it, the union of enthusiasm with caution and wisdom, of lofty inspiring thought with sober self-restraint. The Persian must not hear a word of treason or rebellion. Judah must be filled with faith in a glorious future and inspired to more zealous activity in these critical days before the coming of the king's decree. Zechariah's great sermon in a series of visions shows the successful accomplishment of his task. He stands alone at this crisis and single-handed leads the people and their leaders to the work. It will be possible here to give but brief summaries of the contents and meaning of these visions.¹

8. *Its Contents*: "*Peace, Conflict, Victory*,"— "*Be Strong*." With the first scene the prophet has stepped back into the immediate past that he may measure the progress already made in the fulfillment of the Divine purpose. Jehovah's messengers have passed through the earth and all is at peace. Where are the signs of commotion preparing the way of the LORD? Under Cyrus and Cambyses who could look for a change? Has Jehovah ceased to be gracious? No, saith the LORD, "I will yet choose Jerusalem."² A new look and we are transported into the present! The promise is fulfilling. The horns which scattered the nation are themselves about to be broken. The peoples are in confusion, and the preparation for Messiah's Kingdom is begun.³ Yet, the question arises, has arisen often in the minds of Jerusalem's leaders, "Can Jerusalem hope to escape disaster all unprotected as she is from this storm of earthly warfare? If only she had fortifications!" But the prophet is otherwise minded. In his opinion he that would plan for Jerusalem's walls, sincere though he be, is yet mistaken. His defenses would only injure the prosperity of the city to which so many are to flock that no fortifications which he would construct could contain the multitude. More than that, the true bulwark of Jerusalem is Jehovah.⁴ Walls did not save Babylon. Nor will they save the city now from Dareios. Let Jehovah's people there escape before the storm strikes them. Let them come to Jerusalem, where Jehovah dwelleth, for He is roused up to "choose Jerusalem."⁵ Thus far Zechariah has spoken in easily intelligible words the encouraging message of Jehovah. But he has something more detailed to declare. The wretched condition of affairs has pressed most heavily upon the priesthood. Have they not been most responsible? They formed a large body among the exiles. They must at least have suffered most from the disappointment, perhaps, sunk most deeply into discouragement. But Zechariah regards all that as past. In the new day that is breaking, the priesthood in the person of Joshua is exonerated and given places of honor.⁶ The words, from this

¹ A comparison of the following summary with the corresponding Scripture material will be sufficient to make the course of thought and meaning of the statements clear.

² Zech. i. 8-17.

³ Zech. i. 18-21.

⁴ Ibid. ii. 1-6.

⁵ Ibid. ii. 7-13.

⁶ Zech. iii. 1-7.

point become mysterious, enigmatic. Commentators have struggled with them in vain. There are three elements, the "Branch," the "Stone," and the connection of both with Joshua and his fellows. All agree that the "Branch" is the Messianic King. It is evident that Zechariah, with the Persian officer present in the city could not mention "the King" openly. If we remember that the fundamental thought of the time was, first build the temple, then expect the Messianic reign, would not the reference to the "Stone" and its relation to the priesthood be reasonably clear to the prophet's hearers? The priesthood represents the spiritual side of the temple, the stone is the emblem of the material structure they are now raising. The stone has seven eyes, it will see the King in his beauty, for He will surely enter the finished temple where the priests shall behold Him too, if they are faithful, and the land rejoice in peace and love.¹

As though overwhelmed at the prospect, the prophet must be awakened to the perception of a new thought.² The priesthood has been encouraged. Now the other leaders and workers are to receive light and help. "The work is so great, the means so small, the difficulties so formidable, the consent of Dareios so improbable—is there any likelihood that any of us shall live to see the temple completed? If we only had an army to enforce our rights and join in the struggle against Dareios!" The prophet answers, "the lamps in the candlestick shine by means of oil from above and outside of themselves. Your success shall come, but by no army."³ The spirit of Jehovah shall carry you through from these small beginnings to glorious completion, O Zerubbabel. Jehovah is watching the turmoil throughout the world. He is in the midst of the armies. But He rejoices more over the work which you are doing and shall accomplish, if you recognize and trust to the real source of your strength." These words are very closely connected with those of the preceding vision. They suggest more than they plainly state. The "Branch" is to appear at the completion of the temple. Zerubbabel, who has begun, shall finish it. Is he, indeed, *the King*? "Not by armies, not by mighty men, but by my spirit, saith Jehovah." The two following visions corroborate the hints which underlie the vision just preceding, by affirming vividly the result upon the land of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. They are very suggestive of the moral condition of the mass of the returned exiles. The last vision returns to the present again from which the flight has been taken into the impending glorious future. The war chariots come forth to put the earth in uproar. That which moves toward Persia has accomplished all that could be desired. Perhaps new rumors of rebellion in the provinces had just reached Jerusalem. But looking beyond the mere immediate confusion the prophet sees the ultimate issue of the conflict and his spirit is quieted.⁴

¹ Ibid. iii. 8-10.

² Ibid. iv. 1-14.

³ Zech. iv. 6 (margin).

⁴ Zech v. 1-vi. 8.

9. *The Case before Dareios.* It is a question whether this series of splendid visions with their encouraging import and mysterious promise were proclaimed all at one time, or are to be regarded as separate addresses given as occasion required throughout this trying season of uncertainty, while the answer from the king was awaited. Dareios was still in the thick of the combat with his rebellious subjects. It is not impossible that he was at Babylon when the message of the satrap of Syria reached him. The Chaldaean revolt had been quelled in the early spring of 520.¹ When the document of Cyrus was not found in Babylon, the search must be transferred to the archives at Ekbatana. This city, the capital of Media, had been the centre of the most stubborn revolt of all with which Dareios had to deal. Providentially for this affair of the Jews, the king had succeeded in winning back the province in May or June of that same year, and the usurper Phraortes was executed in this very city of Ekbatana only three months before the letter of Tattenai was despatched. There the missing decree was found, and its contents satisfied Dareios of the sincerity and innocence of the religious founders at Jerusalem as well as of the legality of their proceeding. He adds further privileges and largesses to the generous provisions of the Cyrus mandate, requiring only that the royal family be remembered in the prayers of the sanctuary. His attitude is precisely that of Cyrus. The attempt has been made to contrast the two kings in their religious character and attitude toward their subject peoples, but the facts are against it. Both were governed by the same principle of religious toleration. Dareios is no fanatic as Cyrus is no indifferentist. Both favored religiously not only the Jews but other peoples in their realm. Dareios rebuilt temples in Egypt and allowed himself to be pictured there in the act of bringing offerings to Amon. He offered a large reward for the discovery of a new Apis bull and won the hearts of the Egyptians by his favor to their religion. It is unlikely that different motives induced him to help the Jerusalem temple builders in this crisis, unless we may see in the language and details of the decree² a special interest in their affairs. They were in the midst of a great move-

¹ The long siege which is described in Herodotus can not have taken place under Dareios. Nöldeke (*Ency. Brit. art. Persia*) suggests that the narrative should apply to Xerxes' siege.

² Ezra vi. 6-12. It is probable that the words as here given are those of the writer rather than the original document of the king. They are too Jewish to be the latter. Hunter, *After the Exile*, I. p. 156, holds that Zerubbabel had gone to Dareios as a special envoy to plead the cause of Jerusalem. This embassy underlies the fictitious events of I Apoc. Ezra. See his authorities. The evidence is not strong enough to offset the objection created by the silence of Haggai and Zechariah, not to say the Book of Ezra, on this most important event of the history. It would be very enticing, however, to accept this view and bring the return of Zerubbabel with the royal decree of favor into connection with Zechariah's sermon of the "crown" (cf. below).

ment of history, their fate and actions controlled by principles which were drawn from a wide range of experience and influence. God had bound up their career with that of the great Persian Empire and was using its kings, unconsciously on their part, to accomplish His purposes for His people.

10. *The Prophet triumphant; "the Crown."* When Dareios' decision reached Jerusalem is not recorded. Tattenai and his officers, on receiving it, proceeded to announce it and to carry out its provisions.¹ It was a proud day for the prophets when the truth was known. They had carried the people through the crisis, and their words of promise and faith were now crowned by the reality of assured facts. Zechariah was roused to great enthusiasm. It is not improbable that he ventured at this time upon the boldest of his mysterious deeds the record of which, often strangely misunderstood, is found in chapter vi, vs. 9-15 of his prophecies. A combination of events stirred him to preach in symbolic action the sermon of "the crown." His confidence in the favor of Dareios had been confirmed. But more than that, his call to the Babylonian Jews to come forth, and his declaration that Jerusalem was soon to be filled to overflowing were both strikingly answered. The knowledge of Dareios' marked kindness to the Jews of the Return, would naturally become known and lead some of those still remaining behind to unite their fortunes to the favored community. Some of those thus minded had reached Jerusalem about this time and were lodged temporarily with a certain Josiah. They had brought presents of gold and silver, perhaps for the temple building. Zechariah is directed to go to them. He takes of their gifts, and has a "crown" made. Manifestly this has reference to the expected king. It would be highly dangerous to the good standing of the community with the Persian court if the prophet should proceed solemnly to crown some civil functionary, Zerubbabel, for example, whom he had already vaguely, yet in intelligible symbolism, encouraged with such hopes. But just as before he had used the priesthood as the instrument for pointing out the prince and king, so he places the crown on the head of not Zerubbabel but Joshua, yet with significant words that show his reference to the former. Comparing this passage with iii. 8, 9 and iv. 9, we see that it combines the statements of the two. "The Branch" is before the people; he shall finish the temple; "he shall sit upon the throne; there shall be a priest upon his throne," *i. e.*, beside him, and "*the two*" shall be at peace. How clear when one recognizes the situation! Zechariah knows that there will be no suspicion of political rebellion when he puts the crown on Joshua,² yet he makes it very

¹ Ezra vi. 13.

² Various explanations and changes of text have been introduced to do away with the evident difficulty in this passage. Some maintain that the name of Joshua has been deliberately substituted for the original Zerubbabel by a later priestly editor in the interests of the priesthood. Others think that in vi. 11 a clause has fallen out after the word "Joshua," viz., "and upon the head of Zerubbabel." The interpretation here given solves the difficulty and is in perfect harmony with the historical situation as well as with Zechariah's preceding prophecies.

plain to the people that it is not Joshua who is meant, that he represents the other leader, the prince, Zerubbabel, who is the "Branch," the builder of the temple, the heir of the promises. Yet, just as in iii. 1-7, the prophet has also a promise of exaltation for the priesthood itself; it is to be in close relation and perfect harmony with the king. The scene closes with a reaffirmation that the Jews who live in the distant lands shall return, just as had already happened in the case of the three men before them. The crown is to be deposited in the temple as a memorial and a pledge.

11. *Zechariah's last Sermons.* This occasion and its circumstances mark the culmination of Zechariah's work for the community. It had no such far-reaching significance as that of the older prophets. No such important political crisis as that which confronted Isaiah, no grave religious conflict like that in which Elijah was engaged, fell in Zechariah's time. But it was a real crisis, a true conflict, if on a small scale, and the later prophet showed a resolution, a fertility of resource and a power of bringing things to pass which compare well with the qualities of the heroes of old. God had a work for him to do as well, and he did it well. He stirred the dormant energies of his people into action, tided them over a difficult situation without loss of energy, held out before them high hopes and made these bright with truly prophetic lustre. He kept alive the enthusiasm which he had roused during the years of work which lay between the beginning and the completion of their task. We have three final addresses from him, the first dated in the fourth year of Dareios (518 B. C.), and the others later, but undated, probably connected in time as in contents with the first. The situation has now slightly changed. Under the prophetic impulse and by means of the substantial help of the Persian court, the temple is going forward to completion. A deputation comes to the religious authorities at Jerusalem from Bethel¹ asking whether it is necessary to observe the fasts instituted in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem now that the city is rebuilt. Zechariah takes occasion to emphasize the non-ritual side of life and religion in a way irresistibly reminding one of the earlier prophets. The temple being well under way, it is necessary to remember that all which the temple represents should make for *righteousness* among the people. "Be joyful, feast instead of fast now, in view of Jehovah's goodness and favor, and to the end that all this may be real and lasting, *love truth and peace*. Then you shall be the nation and the people sought out by all the world as the one among whom God dwells."² It has been said, but without ground, that Haggai and Zechariah gave forth only hollow echoes of earlier prophets. When we read such lofty ethical sentiments as these, it must be confessed that they had at least learned wisely from their

¹ Zech. vii. 2. Hunter, *After the Exile* I. p. 188 note, holds that the Jewish commentators were right in regarding *Bethel* as an error for *Babel*, and that the deputation is from the Jews of the Exile. There is little to favor this.

² Zech. viii. 18-23.

masters, and that too in a time when all the tendencies of thought and action were in the other direction. They, themselves, saw eye to eye with their contemporaries thus far, that they recognized the supreme task of the people to be the building of the temple. This very conviction must have hampered them in their more spiritual conceptions, and may, perhaps, explain the labored style which their prophecies show. That they succeeded in living and working also in the higher atmosphere is proof of their power.

12. The Temple Completed. They accomplished at least the primary element of their task. Four years and more after the first impulse to the building of the temple was given by Haggai, in the last month of the year (March-April), in the sixth year of Dareios (B. C. 516), came the end of the work.¹ The consecration of the completed effort followed soon, when the broad ideas and expectations of the returned were manifested in the sin-offering, which consisted of twelve he-goats for *all-Israel*, now to be reunited in the new Messianic day. A few days after came the new year and the feast of the Passover. Surely they had cause for joy, for the LORD had done great things for them. He had won for them the favor of the King of Persia. He had moved on the hearts of many of their brethren in the East to come and join in their work, and some had even separated themselves from the mixed peoples around them and had sought the LORD. Deeper thoughts lay behind these, and greater expectations. Prophets, priests, nobles and prince were ready for the dawning of that morning whose glory to inspired anticipation seemed already gilding the topmost summits of the new Temple.

¹ Ezra vi. 13-22.